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# Lambda Letters Project

## August, 1993 Newsletter

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In the first six months of this year, Lambda Letters Project collected almost 17,000 letters. Compare that with only 20,000 letters during all of last year! Each year we have doubled the number of letters collected and it seems possible that we may do the same again this year.

Now we need to sell Entertainment Books like never before to provide the money to fuel that continued growth. It's important to grow because the more letters we send that support your views, the more likely the politicians will listen to you.

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## Lambda Reaches Out!

The Lambda Letters Project is becoming a truly statewide effort. Last month we had 685 people on our mailing list, with less than 44% of them from the metropolitan Sacramento area. Several other areas have large numbers of members. For example, we have 84 members in Fresno County, 58 in Sonoma County, 57 in San Diego County and 41 in San Francisco. **Please introduce more friends to Lambda Letters so we can increase our numbers across the state.** The more legislators receive your letters, the more likely we will get the legislation we all want! □

## Qualified Support for New AIDS Czarina

President Clinton has appointed Ms. Kristine Gebbie, a former health official from the states of Oregon and Washington, as National AIDS Policy Coordinator. This is as high a post as the new "AIDS Czar" will get, and it is one which does not require senatorial confirmation.

According to numerous published reports which we have read, many individuals were offered the job before Ms. Gebbie accepted it. They turned it down because they saw it as the "impossible" task that it may be—having much responsibility but no real authority to make an impact.

Gebbie is a nurse by training and was a member of President Reagan's National Commission on AIDS, but her real record on HIV issues is not clear. Again, media reports in most of the gay as well as the scientific press are mixed: she listens to comments and suggestions but acts like a bland bureaucrat. She gets things done but is in favor of name-linked HIV testing.

### Women's Issue

## Passing the Equal Rights Amendment

Passing the Equal Rights Amendment is long overdue, and Assembly Joint Resolution 1 would put California on record in support of a federal Equal Rights Amendment. Now is the time to get support for the ERA, since a federal bill has been introduced as House Joint Resolution 1 by Congressman Don Edwards and as Senate Joint Resolution 40 by Senator Ted Kennedy.

AJR 1 states that the citizens of California support amending the U.S. Constitution to end discrimination on the basis of gender—just as the United States has previously renounced slavery,

Because her appointment is not subject to senatorial confirmation, much of what we can do is wait and see; we cannot suggest pointed questions for her confirmation hearing, for instance. But we are writing her and suggesting some items for her agenda.

Although she has no cabinet rank herself, she is supposed to work across cabinet departments. This is because a number of government departments concern themselves with HIV disease. These include the following, among others:

Department of Veterans Affairs, regarding care in VA outpatient centers and hospitals (they care for more PLAWs than any institution in the world)

Department of Defense, both in the Army and proposed vaccine trials, as well as research

Department of Health and Human Services (they include the National Institutes of Health [NIH], which funds most federal HIV/AIDS research, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Social Security Administration, which administers disability payments to PLAWs)

Department of Housing and Urban Development, which controls funds for housing assistance to PLAWs

Department of Labor with the Occupational Health and Safety Administration

The reference in our letter to Dr. (Harold)

Varmus refers to President Clinton's designate for Director of the NIH. Varmus, a Nobel Prize-winning virologist from the University of California, San Francisco, has been an outspoken critic of what he calls "disease oriented," as opposed to basic, biomedical research. With him running the NIH, there is bound to be conflict concerning AIDS-specific research.

Finally, with the National Commission on AIDS (unfortunately never more than a fact-

*finding and recommending body) due to close its doors on the first of September, there is no one left but Gebbie and the HIV/AIDS lobbying community to push the Commission's numerous recommendations into action. Sacramento area residents needed to open and countersigned letters returned to LLP. Will track those who return letters each month. Will put the letters in envelopes addressed to legislators. Ideal job for a couple.*

## Congressional Analysis

# Bad Votes in D.C.

Recently we lost two important votes in the U.S. House of Representatives. One vote related to a woman's right to choose and one was on domestic partner benefits.

In the first vote, on June 30, the House voted to re-enact the Hyde amendment which prohibits the use of federal funds, including Medicaid funds, to pay for abortions. The following Members of the California delegation voted *for* the Hyde amendment and in favor of denying federal funds for abortions: Baker (R), Calvert (R), Condit (D), Cox (R), Cunningham (R), Doolittle (R), Dornan (R), Drier (R), Gallegly (R), Herger (R), Huffington (R), Hunter (R), Kim (R), Lewis (R), McCandless (R), McKeon (R), Moorhead (R), Packard (R), Pombo (R), Rohrabacher (R), Royce (R), and Thomas (R). (Note: R = Republican and D = Democrat.)

The following Members from California voted *against* the Hyde amendment and to allow the use of federal funds for abortions: Becerra (D), Beilenson (D), Berman (D), Brown (D), Dellums (D), Dixon (D), Dooley (D), Edwards (D), Eshoo (D), Farr (D), Fazio (D), Filner (D), Hamburg (D), Harman (D), Horn (R), Lantos (D), Lehman (D), Martinez (D), Matsui (D), Miller (D), Mineta (D), Pelosi (D), Roybal-Allard (D), Schenk (D), Stark (D), Torres (D), Tucker (D), Waters (D), Waxman (D), and Woolsey (D).

Although most of the Democrats in the California delegation voted against the Hyde amendment, 98 Democrats from various states joined with 157 Republicans to assure passage of this bad legislation.

In the second vote, on June 30th, the House of Representatives overturned a Washington, D.C., ordinance that would have provided health insurance to the domestic partners of Washington, D.C., employees. The following California Representatives voted *against* the ordinance and domestic partners: Baker (R), Calvert (R), Cox (R), Cunningham (R), Doolittle (R), Dornan (R), Drier

(R), Gallegly (R), Herger (R), Horn (R), Huffington (R), Hunter (R), Kim (R), Lewis (R), McCandless (R), McKeon (R), Moorhead (R), Packard (R), Pombo (R), Royce (R), Thomas (R), and Tucker (D).

The following California Representatives voted *in support* of the Washington, D.C., domestic partners ordinance: Becerra (D), Beilenson (D), Berman (D), Brown (D), Condit (D), Dellums (D), Dixon (D), Dooley (D), Edwards (D), Eshoo (D), Farr (D), Fazio (D), Filner (D), Hamburg (D), Harman (D), Lantos (D), Lehman (D), Martinez (D), Matsui (D), Miller (D), Mineta (D), Pelosi (D), Rohrabacher (R), Roybal-Allard (D), Schenk (D), Stark (D), Torres (D), Waters (D), and Woolsey (D).

We can thank 95 Democratic members of the House of Representatives who joined with 158 Republicans to defeat this domestic partners legislation.

## Do You Know Who Your Legislators Are?

A viable Democracy requires an informed electorate. If you would like the names, addresses, and phone numbers of your legislators and other elected officials, send a request along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

**The Lambda Letters Project**

**6212 Silverton Way**

**Carmichael, CA 95608**

We would be happy to furnish you with their names!

## New Disability Regulations Help Those with HIV

The regulations of the Social Security Administration (SSA) are used to determine whether or not a person is disabled. Any person so diagnosed is able to receive disability benefits which provide cash assistance and access to medical services. The problem has been that with respect to HIV disease or AIDS, the SSA's Listing of Impairments has been far from all inclusive. Especially short-changed have been women and children who often show different symptoms (impairments) than men do. This is an important fact, since the original listing was based on the illnesses of gay men. Since 1991, if not earlier, health care professionals, PLAWs, AIDS activists, and others have been trying to get the SSA to change the Listing of Impairments and, especially, to make it more inclusive of conditions that affect only women and children.

Their efforts have finally been successful. On July 2, 1993, new SSA regulations became law, effective immediately. SSA was very responsive to the several thousand public comments that were made to the published draft regulations, and they incorporated the most important of these comments in the newly published regulations. Now persistent and severe pelvic inflammatory disease, cancer of the cervix, neurological manifestations of HIV such as peripheral neuropathy, and drug-resistant tuberculosis will qualify a person for SSA disability.

There is also a general open-ended category for those who are functionally disabled by HIV but still do not exactly fit the listed impairments. This is important for the many people who have fallen through the cracks.

It is for these reasons that one of our letters this month is to Dr. Lawrence Thompson, Acting Commissioner of the SSA, congratulating him on

these regulations and urging their rapid dissemination, as well as training in their use. Since most of the work on these regulations had been accomplished under the auspices of Dr. Thompson's successor, Mr. Louis Enoff, eventually we will also send a single thank-you letter to Mr. Enoff, including a count of the number of letters that we generated and sent to Thompson.

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disapproval of the President's failure to lift the military ban and his inept treatment of his nominee for Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Lani Guinier.

Please also express your anger at the failure of the Congressional leadership to support the President's plan to lift the ban; their failure to prevent reenactment of the Hyde amendment, which prohibits the use of federal funds to pay for abortions; and for their failure to prevent rejection of Washington, D.C.'s domestic partners ordinance. (See the article "Bad Votes in D.C." on page x.)

**The ban mistake:** As we know, the President ran into stiff opposition to his plan to end the ban against lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in the military—much of it from key Congressional Democrats, such as Senator Sam Nunn. The Democratic leadership in Congress did little to help their president overcome this opposition. The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy, recently announced by the President, makes virtually no change in the situation faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual servicepeople. Although they are no longer to be asked whether or not they are homosexuals, if they get found out (that is,

# Support for Surgeon General Designate Elders

President Clinton has nominated Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the former Arkansas Director of Health, to be Surgeon General of the United States. This is the post once held by Dr. C. Everett Koop, and its power is largely dependent on the officeholder. A Surgeon General can either be invisible or a force for major change in public health policy.

Because of her outspoken stand on widespread condom distribution and early sex education in schools, Dr. Elders' nomination has run into trouble in the Senate, with Republican conservatives leading the opposition. The Congressional Black Caucus stands firmly behind her, but more help is needed.

On behalf of all members, Lambda Letters has written to Senators Boxer and Feinstein, urging that they work in support of Dr. Elders' nomination. We believe that recent accusations against Dr. Elders of salary double-dipping are simply a smoke screen for some Senators' sex-phobic and possibly anti-Clinton or anti-Black attitudes.

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racial discrimination, and the denial of women's right to vote. The resolution has passed the Assembly and now goes to the Senate for approval.

Because California's laws adequately protect women, a state ERA is not as necessary as it is at the federal level where Congress and the courts have proven not to be great defenders of women's rights. The California Supreme Court has consistently held that the California constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender. Current U.S. Supreme Court decisions, however, apply the highest standard of review to some forms of discrimination cases such as racial discrimination, but less rigorous standard of review for sex discrimination cases.

The federal ERA was first introduced in 1923, three years after women had secured the

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"caught" doing what lesbians, gays, and bisexuals do if they *are* lesbians, gays, and bisexuals!), they are removed from the service.

**The Guinier mistake:** The President handled the nomination of Lani Guinier very badly. After nominating her, Clinton withdrew his nomination after some of her more controversial writings came to light, without even allowing her the opportunity to defend her views in Senate hearings. The writings in question suggested that it might be necessary to guarantee minorities a certain number of legislative seats in Congress and state legislatures in order to give minorities a real opportunity to affect legislation that relates to their concerns. Whether or not you agree with that view, the President should have been aware of the writings before he nominated her. If he didn't agree with those views, he shouldn't have nominated her. Since he *did* nominate her he should have stuck with her to give her day in court at the Senate hearings.

The Democratic party has a majority in both houses of Congress. Even so, the House upheld a ban on the use of federal funds to pay for abortions and defeated Washington, D.C.'s domestic partners ordinance. The facts reveal that large numbers of Democrats voted the wrong way on these issues. What this means is that we were poorly served by the Democratic leadership in Congress.

Please urge David Wilhelm to persuade Congress and the President to:

- ♦ Totally and unconditionally end the ban on lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in the military
- ♦ Overturn the Hyde amendment to allow federal funds to be used for abortions
- ♦ Reinstate Washington, D.C.'s domestic partners ordinance.